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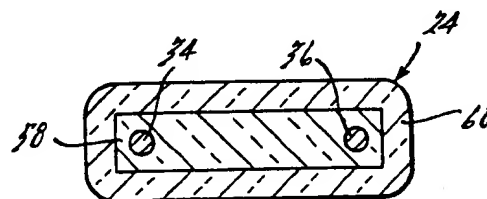
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⑤④ **Thermistor and method of fabrication.**

⑤⑦ A high temperature thermistor (24) is fabricated from titanium dioxide ceramic forming material which is processed to produce a sensor body (58) having a pair of electrical leads (34, 36) in spaced apart relation embedded within the body and with the body having a porosity compatible with use as a rapid response time partial pressure of oxygen responsive sensor. The sensor body (58) is then coated with a layer (60) of oxygen impervious barrier or maskant material. This material masks the sensor (58) from any changes in the partial pressure of oxygen of its environment and permits the sensor to respond electrically exclusively to changes in the temperature of its environment. At elevated temperatures above about 700°F the encapsulated titania ceramic material behaves as a semiconductor having a resistance which is responsive to the temperature of the sensor element (58). The thermistor (24) is fabricated by processing titania powder which includes a substantial majority of rutile phase material.



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SPECIFICATION

TITLE

THERMISTOR AND METHOD OF FABRICATION

DESCRIPTION

1 This invention relates to thermistors.

It has been determined that the operation of a conventional automotive internal combustion engine produces substantially quantities of deleterious gaseous combustion by-products. The principal pollutants so produced are hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide and various oxides of nitrogen. Extensive investigation into the combustion process, examination of alternative combustion processes and detailed studies of exhaust gas treatment devices have led to the conclusion that the use of a catalytic converter within the exhaust system of an internal combustion engine provides a practical and effective technique for substantially reducing the emission of the deleterious gaseous combustion by-products into the atmosphere.

A catalytic exhaust gas treatment device or converter which is capable of substantially simultaneously converting all three of the aforementioned principal pollutants into water, carbon dioxide and gaseous nitrogen is referred to as a "three-way catalyst". However, for the known three-way catalyst devices to be most effective, the gaseous by-products introduced into the converter must be the by-products of combustion of a substantially stoichiometric air/fuel ratio. Such three-way catalyst devices are said to have a very narrow "window" of air/fuel ratios at which the device is most efficiently operative on the three principal pollutants. By way of example, if λ is the air/fuel ratio normalized to stoichiometry, the window may extend from about 0.99λ to about 1.01λ . Such a three-way catalyst device is described, for example, in United States Letters Patent 3,895,093 issued to Weidenbach et al. on July 15, 1975, assigned to Kali Chemie Aktiengesellschaft and titled "Catalytic Removal of Carbon Monoxide Unburned Hydrocarbon and Nitrogen Oxide from Automotive Exhaust Gas". For air/fuel ratios of the combustion mixture on either side of the window, one or two of the principal pollutants will be converted in only very small percentage efficiencies. Within the window, the three principal pollutants will be converted at very high efficiencies approaching 90% in some cases. In view of the narrowness of the catalytic converter window it has been determined that the associated combustion source must be operated with a combustible mixture as close as possible to stoichiometry.

1 The most satisfactory technique for assuring continuous or sub-
stantially continuous operation at the optimum air/fuel ratio is through
the utilization of an appropriate feedback mechanism. In implementing
suitable feedback control systems it has been proposed to employ sensors
5 responsive to the chemistry of the exhaust gases, that is, the hot gaseous
combustion by-products, in order to control the precise air content and/
or fuel content of the air/fuel mixture being provided to the combustion
source. One type of electrochemical exhaust gas sensor employs a ceramic
material which demonstrates a predictable electrical resistance change
10 when the partial pressure of oxygen of its environment changes. An ex-
ample of such a material is titania (titanium dioxide having a general
formula TiO_2). Such sensors may be fabricated generally in accordance
with the teachings of United States Letters Patent 3,886,785 issued to
Stadler et al., entitled "Gas Sensor and Method of Manufacture". Tests
15 of such devices have shown that at elevated and substantially constant
temperatures the devices will demonstrate a virtual step change in resis-
tance for rich-to-lean and lean-to-rich excursions of the air/fuel ratio
of the combustion mixture producing the exhaust gas environment of the
device.

20 A principal difficulty which has been encountered with such
variably resistance devices resides in the fact that such devices
demonstrate a measurable resistance change which is also a function of
change of the temperature of the ceramic material. For example, a temp-
erature change of about 500° F produces a measurable resistance change on
25 the order of magnitude of a sensed rich-to-lean or lean-to-rich air/fuel
mixture change. Such a temperature variation may be encountered, depen-
ding of course to some extent on the location of placement of the sensor
within an exhaust system, during acceleration of the associated engine
from idle speed to highway speeds. Heretofore, exhaust gas sensors which
30 employed a variable resistance sensor ceramic have required that the tem-
perature of the material be relatively closely controlled for reliable
use in a feedback system intended to provide an internal combustion engine
with very precise air/fuel ratio control.

35 Temperature control of the associated sensor has proved to be
an expensive and not wholly satisfactory technique for adapting such
variable resistance sensor ceramic materials to air/fuel ratio feedback
control systems in automotive internal combustion engines. In order to

1 overcome the difficulties encountered, it has been suggested to combine
a thermistor in an electrical series circuit with the variable resis-
tance exhaust gas sensor and to operate the electrical series circuit
as a voltage divider network deriving a useful voltage signal from the
5 junction between the thermistor and the variable resistive gas sensor
element. However, known thermistors are not capable of operating within
the exhaust gas environment of a combustion source. To operate within
such an environment, the thermistor must be capable of withstanding temp-
eratures in the range of from 700°F to 1500°F for extended periods of
10 time and also be capable of tolerating the adverse chemical environment
of an automotive engine exhaust system.

According to the present invention, there is provided a therm-
istor comprising a body of ceramic material; two electrical leads embedd-
ed in mutually noncontacting relation in said body, said ceramic material
15 having an electrical resistance which varies with temperature and with
partial pressure of oxygen at elevated temperatures characterised in that
the body of ceramic material is substantially completely encapsulated
in a coating of oxygen-impervious material.

In analyzing the reason why a partial pressure of oxygen res-
ponsive ceramic material such as titania also demonstrates a measurable
20 resistance change in the presence of variation in temperature, it was
determined that the ceramic material functions as a composite variable
resistor having a resistance variation component which is responsive to
changes in partial pressure of oxygen and a further resistance component
25 which is responsive to changes in temperature. Since, according to our
determination, the ceramic material functions as a composite variable
resistor, we have determined that a suitable thermistor may be fabricated
provided the oxygen sensitivity of the ceramic material can be eliminated.
We have determined that oxygen sensitivity can be eliminated by encapsu-
30 lating a porous titania partial pressure of oxygen responsive sensor in
a material which is oxygen impervious and which is also preferably relat-
ively compatible with the titania in terms of thermal expansion match
and nonreactivity. Both glass and ceramic materials generally offer the
best source of encapsulant. By encapsulating the titania partial pressure
35 of oxygen responsive sensor in a material which comprises an oxygen
barrier or maskant, the titania sensor so encapsulated will be exposed to

1 an essentially constant partial pressure of oxygen in its environment
and any electrical variation can be attributed solely to the influence
of change in temperature of the thermistor. The present invention thus
provides a titania thermistor comprised of porous titania ceramic mater-
5 ial which has been processed to form a partial pressure of oxygen res-
ponsive sensor but which is encapsulated in oxygen bearer mask material.

A preferred embodiment of the invention will now be described,
by way of example only, with reference to the drawings in which:-

Figure 1 illustrates an exhaust gas sensor construction incor-
10 porating a thermistor according to the present invention.

Figure 2 illustrates, in an exploded view, the exhaust gas sen-
sor according to Figure 1.

Figure 3 illustrates the electrical series connection of the
partial pressure of oxygen responsive ceramic sensor member with a
15 thermistor member.

Figure 4 illustrates an enlarged sectional view of a thermistor
fabricated according to the present invention and illustrating the encap-
sulant according to the present invention.

Referring now to the drawing wherein like numerals designate
20 like structure throughout the various views thereof, an exhaust gas
sensor 10 is shown in Figure 1. Exhaust gas sensor 10 is of utility,
for example, as the partial pressure of oxygen responsive element inser-
table into the exhaust system of an internal combustion engine or a fur-
nace for monitoring the partial pressure of oxygen of the hot gaseous
25 combustion by-products produced thereby in order to generate a signal
indicative of the quality of the combustion process. In particular, the
equivalence ratio, λ , of the combustion mixture being provided to the
engine or furnace may be determined by analysis of the partial pressure
of oxygen within the exhaust gases.

30 With reference now to Figures 1 and 2, and particularly to
Figure 2, an exhaust gas sensor 10 incorporating the present invention
is illustrated and one possible method of assembly is described. Exhaust
gas sensor 10 is provided with a housing means 12 which is threaded as
at 14 for engagement with a suitably threaded aperture provided therefor
35 within the exhaust gas conduit, not shown, of the combustion source.
Ceramic insulator member 16 extends through housing means 12 and includes
a forwardly projecting sensor support portion 18. Sensor support portion

1 18 includes forwardly projecting collar 20 which defines a well or cavity 22. Forwardly projecting portion 18 is broken away at 21 in Figure 1 for illustrative purposes. The sensor 10 includes a pair of ceramic sensor elements or members 24, 26 received within well 22. Three electrical terminal members 28, 30, 32 extend rearwardly from ceramic insulator member 16. Electrical terminal members 28, 30, 32 are adapted for receipt of suitable mating connectors, not shown, to electrically communicate exhaust gas sensor 10 with associated utilization electrical or electronic circuitry, not shown.

10 The insert portions 28a, 30a, 32a of each of the electrical terminal members 28, 30, 32 may be cemented into position within the rear portion of ceramic insulator member 16. The preferred cement is a catalytic agent, low temperature curable cement which cures to a high density. Such a cement may be, for example, Sauereisen #31. The terminal members 15 28, 30 and 32 are arranged to project an electrical contact portion 28b, 30b and 32b of each terminal member 28, 30 and 32 rearwardly from the rear face of ceramic insulator member 16.

20 The ceramic sensor elements 24, 26 comprise a partial pressure of oxygen responsive ceramic such as titania, for example sensor element 26, and a temperature compensating thermistor according to the present invention, for example sensor element 24. As used herein, the term thermistor refers to an electronic device which has an electrical parameter or property, such as its electrical resistance, which varies rapidly and predictably with the temperature of the device and which parameter or property does not vary in response to changes in partial pressure of 25 oxygen of the environment of the device.

30 The thermistor element according to the present invention, ceramic sensor element 24, is connected electrically in series with the partial pressure of oxygen responsive element, sensor element 26, in order to compensate for any tendency of the partial pressure of oxygen responsive element 26 to change its electrical resistance in response to temperature variation. The series connected ceramic sensor element 24, 26 are arranged to be exposed to substantially the same exhaust gas environment and are arranged to define an electrical voltage divider network wherein the desired output signal is derived from the circuit junction between the ceramic sensor elements, i.e., the junction of the thermistor element with the partial pressure of oxygen responsive sensor 35 element.

1 Each ceramic sensor element 24, 26 is provided with a pair of
electrical leads 34, 36, 38 and 40. Electrical leads 34 and 40 are
provided with individual insulating sleeve members 42. The electrical
leads 36, 38 are shown being provided with a further insulating sleeve
5 44. Insulating sleeve members 42, 42 with their interiorly received
electrical leads 34, 36, 38 and 40 are threaded through longitudinally
extending bores or passages within, and which extend completely through
ceramic insulator member 16 from the bottom of well or cavity 22 to the
rear face of ceramic insulator member 16. Electrical lead 34 and its
10 associated insulating sleeve 42 are inserted into the insert portion 28a
of electrical terminal member 28. The electrical lead 34 is electrically
united with the electrical contact portion 28b of terminal member 28.
Similarly, electrical lead 40 and its associated insulator member 42 are
inserted into the insert portion 30a of second electrical terminal mem-
15 ber 30. The electrical lead 40 is electrically united with electrical
contact portion 30b of terminal member 30. The conductor formed by sen-
sor leads 36, 38 and the associated insulator sleeve member 44 are simil-
arly inserted into the insert portion 32a of electrical terminal 32 and
the conductive portion thereof is electrically united with the electrical
20 contact portion 32b of terminal member 32.

 The ceramic sensor elements 24, 26 are situated within the well
or cavity 22 and are shown to be supported by their associated electrical
leads 34, 36, 38 and 40. Projecting collar 20 thus may be operative
upon insertion of the exhaust gas sensor 10 into an exhaust gas system
25 to shield the ceramic sensor elements 24, 26 from impact by any solid
particles which may be dislodged from the interior surface of the exhaust
gas conduit. Collar 20 also protects the electrical leads 34, 36, 38 40
from flexure induced by pressure and exhaust gas flow fluctuations within
the exhaust gas system. Collar 20 further protects the ceramic sensor
30 elements 24, 26 and their electrical leads 34, 36, 38 and 40 from possible
damage during assembly and from handling damage prior to or during insta-
llation into an exhaust gas system.

 Ceramic insulator member 16 is provided with a centrally
position enlarged annular portion 46 which is provided with a seal rec-
35 eiving recess 48 at its forward shoulder. Enlarged annular portion 46
is provided with an abutment shoulder 50 at its rear. The forwardly pro-
jecting portion 16 of ceramic insulator member 16 is inserted through seal

1 member 52 and seal member 52 is loosely received within recess 48. The
ceramic insulator member 16 is then inserted into housing means 12. The
rear portion 54 of housing means 12 is then crimped or otherwise deformed
5 into close intimate contact with the rear shoulder 50 of the central
portion 46 of ceramic insulator means 16 to compressively and sealingly
confine seal member 62 between recess 48 and a suitably provided shoulder
within the central portion of housing means 12. Seal member 52 is
operative to define a fluid tight barrier to flow around insulator member
16 through housing means 12. Seal member 52 is operative to establish a
10 fluid tight barrier between the interior of an exhaust gas conduit and
the exterior of the exhaust gas conduit into which an exhaust gas sensor
10 has been inserted.

Referring now to Figure 3, the electrical series connection
between ceramic sensor elements 24 and 26 and electrical leads 34, 36, 38
15 and 40 is illustrated. Electrical leads 36, 38 are electrically united,
as by welding, at junction 56. A single electrical lead 37 extends from
junction 56. With reference to Figures 1 and 2, electrical lead 34
communicates, for example, with terminal member 28, electrical lead 40
communicates, for example, with terminal member 30 and electrical lead
20 37 may extend through insulating member 44 to communicate sensor leads
36, 38 for example, with terminal member 32.

One of the ceramic sensor elements, for example sensor element
24, is a high temperature thermistor fabricated according to the present
invention. The other of the sensor elements, for example sensor element
25 26, is a variably resistive partial pressure of oxygen responsive ceramic
such as for example titania, which also demonstrates an electrical resistance
variation in response to changes in its temperature. The partial
pressure of oxygen responsive sensor element 26 may be formed of titania
material in the manner described in issued United States Letters Patent
30 3,886,785, titled Gas Sensor and Method of Manufacture, issued in the
name of Henry L. Stadler et al. and assigned to the assignee of this invention.
The preferred form of partial pressure of oxygen responsive
ceramic sensor element 26 to be used in fabricating exhaust gas sensor 10
is the improved form described in the above noted copending patent application
35 Serial No. _____ (our reference US-920). Preferably,
the thermistor member 24 and the partial pressure of oxygen responsive
member 26 are fabricated from the same metal oxide ceramic forming base

1 material. The advantage of this feature is discussed hereinbelow.

By utilizing titania as the base material for formation of a thermistor to be used in conjunction with a titania partial pressure of oxygen responsive sensor, economies of scale in raw material purchasing
5 and simplification of the processing steps may be achieved. Further simplification of the processing steps can be achieved if the thermistor is fabricated to demonstrate a porosity consonant with use as a partial pressure of oxygen responsive sensor and is then further processed to include an oxygen barrier or maskant encapsulant. By utilizing a titania
10 ceramic element processed to be porous as the thermistor a further advantage is realised. At relatively high environmental temperatures, for example temperatures above about 1600°F, the electrical resistance component of titania which varies as a function of temperature drops significantly. One form of titania-based thermistor which has been proposed,
15 the densified titania form, demonstrates a lowered inherent resistance due to the increase in density. By maintaining titania porosity in the thermistor, high environmental temperatures will not cause the thermistor resistance to drop to a value which is sufficiently low that the junction voltage would go out of the range of input voltages for associated electronics intended for feedback control using single set point control
20 logic.

The thermistor ceramic sensor element 24 according to the instant invention is formed from essentially pure titania powder. The thermistor chip member 24 may be fabricated in much the same manner as is
25 taught in the noted patent 3,886,785 to Stadler et al. for fabrication of partial pressure of oxygen responsive ceramic sensor elements with one principal difference. After a ceramic wafer has been formed including the provision of two extending electrical leads and having the desired porosity, an additional step is performed on the resulting element to
30 form the thermistor according to our invention. This additional step comprises encapsulating the ceramic element in an oxygen barrier or maskant material selected to be thermally, chemically, and electrically compatible with the titania material. Such an encapsulant can be selected from the general classes of materials described as glasses and ceramics.
35 An example of a suitable glass is Kimble glass ES-1 which is a borosilicate glass. An example of a suitable ceramic is Sauereisen # 8 encapsulant. In selecting a suitable glass or ceramic encapsulant, the expected operating range of temperatures must be taken into consideration

1 along with the electrical, chemical and thermal properties of the contemplated encapsulant.

5 The preferred method of fabricating the thermistor chip member involves the preparation of a substantially pure titania powder. As titania has two phases, the anatase phase and the rutile phase, and the rutile phase is the high temperature stable phase, the titania powder could be comprised of a substantial majority of rutile phase material. In order to convert anatase phase material to rutile phase material, the material may be calcined, for example for two hours at 2100^oF, and then ball milled
10 to produce powder having small particle sizes. The majority of the powder so produced will be rutile phase material. Calcining also improves the purity of the powder by volatilizing any volatilizable impurities. Consonant with processing to achieve a partial pressure of oxygen responsive device, the powder should have 100% of the particles smaller in size than 20 microns and should have a substantial majority of the powder
15 with the particle size smaller than about 10 microns. The processed powders may thereafter be mixed, for example in a ball mill, with an organic binder solution to form a slurry.

20 The slurry may be cast, that is, formed onto a tape or sheet of material such as cellulose acetate or polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), after which the slurry may be air dried, to form a sheet or tape of material. Suitably sized and shaped sensor element wafers of the air dried material may then be cut from the tape for further processing. A pair of lead wires 34, 36 may be inserted into the sensor element at this
25 stage and the sensor element may thereafter be sintered to a pyrometric cone equivalent number 9.

The ceramic element, which at this stage may be either a partial pressure of oxygen responsive element or a thermistor, is then coated with a slurry of powdered glass and water and is heated to a temperature
30 of 1900^oF for a period of time of about 15 minutes in order to form the glass coating and establish the element as a thermistor. The glass encapsulates the chip, masking it from any chemical or electrochemical interaction with its environmental atmosphere making it insensitive to changes in the oxygen partial pressure of the environmental atmosphere.

35 Referring now to Figure 4, an enlarged sectional view of the thermistor chip member 24 according to the instant invention is illustrated. The thermistor chip member 24 comprises an interior titania body

1 58 and an encapsulant coating 60 which completely surrounds and encapsulates the titania element 58. Also illustrated are the interiorly positioned electrical leads 34, 36.

5 In a second fabrication process, the sintered titania chip is coated with a slurry of the selected ceramic forming material, such as Sauereisen# 8 and including a curing catalyst. The slurry-coated chip is then air dried and cured by firing at elevated temperature approximating the anticipated maximum use temperature for its recommended cure time.

10 In one form of construction, a pair of lead wires 34, 36 are placed between a pair of sensor element wafers prior to sintering. In another form of construction, a pair of lead wires are impressed into a single wafer prior to sintering.

15 It will be appreciated that, by using substantially identical starting materials and by adding to the processing a coating step, the electrical response of the sensor chip members to temperature variation will be substantially identical while the responsiveness of the thermistor chip member to variation in oxygen partial pressure will be substantially eliminated. The resulting ceramic thermistor is thus compatible with and
20 suited for operational use with the titania partial pressure of oxygen responsive chip member and will demonstrate a high temperature resistance which is compatible with use in a voltage divider network used to generate an input signal to electronic utilization means designed to operate in accordance with a single set point.

CLAIMS

1 1. A thermistor comprising a body of ceramic material; two
electrical leads embedded in mutually noncontacting relation in said
body; said ceramic material having an electrical resistance which varies
with temperature and with partial pressure of oxygen at elevated tem-
5 peratures characterised in that the body of ceramic material is sub-
stantially completely encapsulated in a coating of oxygen-impervious
material.

 2. A thermistor according to Claim 1 characterised in that said
ceramic material is titania.

10 3. A thermistor according to Claim 1 or Claim 2 characterised
in that said body has a density of from 72% to 85% of the theoretical
density of the ceramic material.

 4. A thermistor according to any one of Claims 1 to 3 charac-
terised in that the oxygen impermeous material comprises a borosilicate
15 glass.

 5. A temperature sensing device for an engine exhaust system
comprising a housing adapted to be mounted in the engine exhaust system
and a thermistor according to any one of Claims 1 to 4 supported in the
housing for location in the exhaust gases passing through the exhaust
20 system.

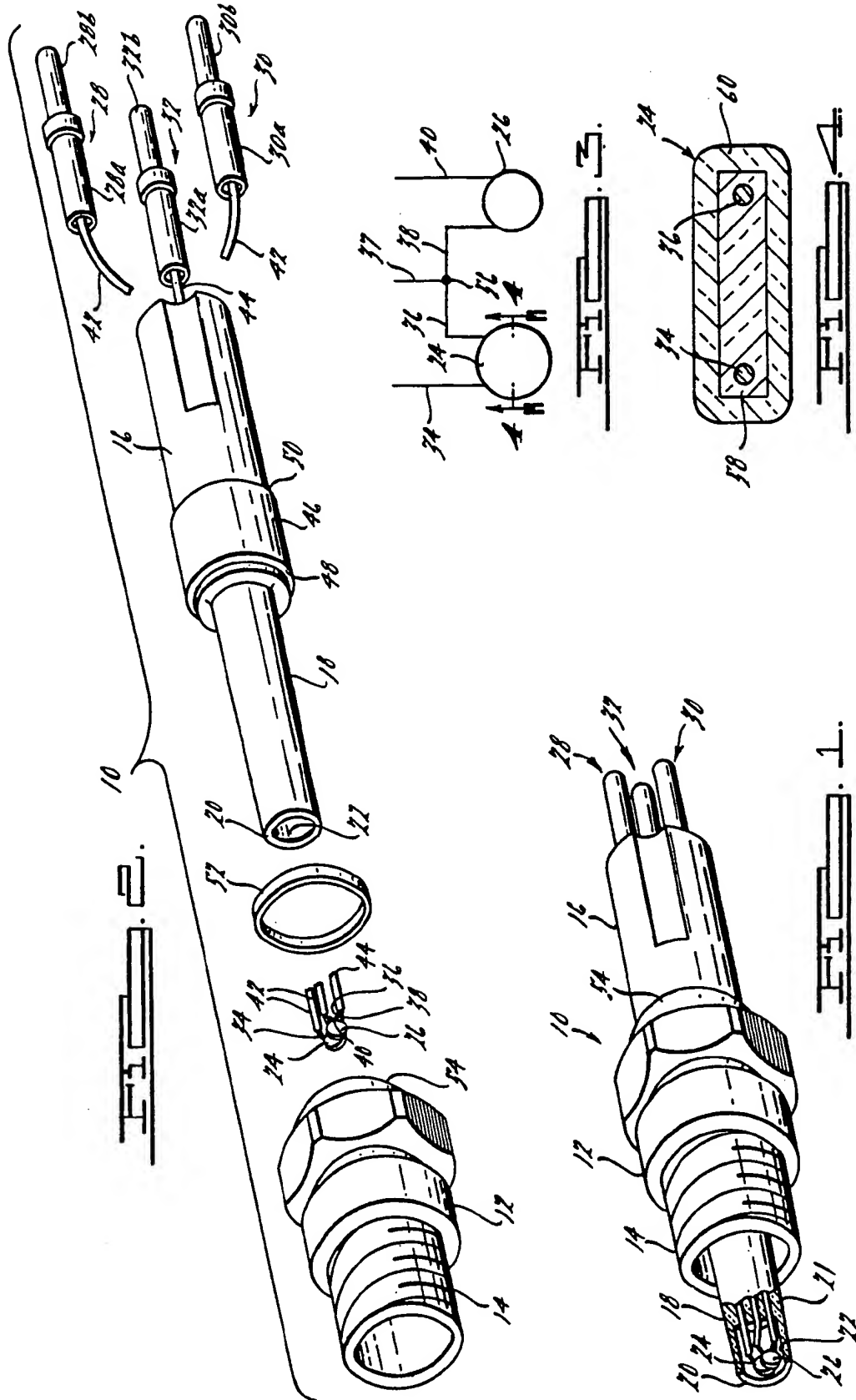
 6. A device according to Claim 5 characterised in that a cera-
mic insulator having a forwardly-projecting sensor portion and a rear-
wardly-extending terminal portion is mounted in the housing, the forwardly-
projecting sensor portion defining an open cavity within which the ther-
25 mistor is received, said cavity having a depth sufficient to shield the
thermistor from the flow of gaseous combustion products in the exhaust
system, and passages extend rearwardly from the cavity within the ceramic
insulator to the terminal portion, the electrical leads to the thermistor
being received in respective ones of the passages.

30 7. A method of manufacture of a thermistor comprising the steps
of forming a powder of ceramic material having an electrical resistance
which varies with temperature and with partial pressure of oxygen; pre-
paring sinterable wafer from said powder; affixing electrodes to said
wafers; sintering said wafer and coating said body with an oxygen im-
35 pervious encapsulant.

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- 1 8. A method according to Claim 7 wherein the wafer is sintered to produce a body having a density of from 72% to 85% of the theoretical density of the ceramic material.
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application numbers

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